

Millions rely on Vox's explainers to understand an increasingly chaotic world. Chip in as little as \$3 to help keep it free for everyone.

Contribute

# The "Worthless Currency Exchange" at Burning Man's Camp Bitcoin

“What if the Winklevosses just walked in right now?”

By **Nellie Bowles** | Aug 28, 2014, 4:54pm EDT



Nellie Bowles

Flipping through my 160-page official Burning Man book of events, I noticed something strange: Camp Bitcoin was hosting a “worthless currency exchange.”

Bitcoin Camp?! Worthless currency exchange? I had some candies in my backpack that could certainly count as currency here.



with a pesticide sprayer full of water. The Redditors told me that the bitcoin guys were just a few streets away, in the Anahasana Village, and that they were a bunch of nerds, real geeks.

The Anahasana Village (Burning Man villages are collections of smaller camps that share resources, like a kitchen) is famous for its contact-improv sessions (standing cuddle puddles) and its tantra dome (what it sounds like).

It's not where one might expect to find Camp Bitcoin.

There was a map at the village gate, but I still got lost. I walked to the village canteen and asked a man, who was stark-naked except for work gloves, where I could find the bitcoin camp.

He laughed. "Oh, yeah, they have a trailer in the corner, and you'll see them. Just some dudes sitting under a tarp."

This sounded right.

There, about a dozen bitcoin dudes were sitting cross-legged in a circle under some scaffolding, an old orange parachute draped over it for shade. They were talking about all the money they could have made if they had bought various cryptocurrencies at various points. The conversation ranged freely:

"Oh, I rode that wave, man. We all could have been millionaires."

"Did you hear about Bytecoin? Far more advanced than Darkcoin."

"What are your views on side chains?"

"At our bitcoin meetup in Bali ...."

"What if the Winklevosses just walked in right now?"

One bitcoin camper, lean and shirtless Josh Katen, explained to me that this isn't really the bitcoin camp anymore.

A woman in a Wonder Woman bustier popped in and gave everyone “death money” — thousand-yuan notes that people in China often bury with their dead.

Thomas Hunt, the creator of the [MadBitcoins YouTube channel](#), put on his bitcoin hat, an Alice-in-Wonderland-style top hat with a B-for-bitcoin on it.

Another shirtless fellow, Joshua Keim, who is building something called [1WorldCurrency.net](#), came in and introduced himself to the Dogecoin collective. He said he had a vision, based on Burning Man’s gifting economy. In his vision, cryptocurrency is just the first step toward making a large-scale gift economy.

“Once we learn to monetize everything, we take this gifting economy out to the world,” Keim said. “We can take the Illuminati’s cyber gold and silver, and distribute it evenly. Once we have this, we can live in abundance, rather than scarcity.”

Manu Bryson-Haynes, who wore his long brown hair in a bun, with yellow aviator glasses and a sarong, said he was working on something similar, called Proof of Human, which is a security system based on a social network. In his world, everyone on the planet would be gifted with currency, and we could all restart — everyone out of debt. He said he also came to Burning Man to see what a gifting- and abundance-based economy could look like. Money and branding aren’t allowed at Burning Man. Everyone brings or prepares gifts (alcohol, snacks such as pancakes, or little necklaces that say “Burning Man 2014”) that they exchange.

“One of the biggest barriers to the gift economy is debt, the usury. With cryptocurrency we can reengineer abundance rather than scarcity,” Bryson-Haynes said. “I have a friend doing permaculture coins — a seed bank tied to cryptocurrency. The currency is the grain. It’s all possibilities now.”

Katen started talking about how someone riding past their camp earlier that day had yelled at them — “F—ing bitcoin’s not allowed on the playa,” or something to that effect. The campers had been surprised but not terribly offended.

---

can turn those skyscrapers into whatever we want. Luxury condos for the homeless! Let's do it now! There's no need to wait! We have the technology, and we have each other."

He waved a peace sign to indicate "goodbye," hopped up and left the tent with the Burner in the Wonder Woman bustier. I followed them out to get some details on their cryptocurrency vision.

"I'm the messiah, and money grows on trees," Keim said.

No, but seriously, what's the gist?

"I am the messiah," he repeated, getting on his dust-and-EL-wire-covered bicycle.

Before I could reenter the tent, an extremely attractive couple stopped me and eyed me up and down.

"This is it, right?" asked the man, who was wearing a top hat and genie pants, which for some reason wasn't even a turn-off anymore. (I've been here too long.)

It?

"Tantra tent?" he asked, cocking his head.

No. Not tantra. Bitcoin.

*This article originally appeared on Recode.net.*